



**Rocky Mountain National Park
Continental Divide Research Learning Center**



Pathways to Parks: Eagle Rock Internship Program

The Eagle Rock Internship Program is a collaborative partnership between Rocky Mountain National Park and Eagle Rock School and Professional Development Center. Eagle Rock School offers a year-round, residential, full-scholarship high school experience for students who apply between the ages of 15-17. This school, located in Estes Park, Colorado, provides students that have not succeeded in traditional public schools with an opportunity to earn a high school diploma. The student body comprises a purposefully diverse community of students from across the nation and abroad. This internship program at Rocky Mountain National Park provides opportunities for students to connect with national parks, foster student interest in science and public lands, increase scientific literacy, and ultimately provide a path for students to explore careers in the National Park Service (NPS).

Pathways to Parks

The Pathways to Parks is an initiative of the Continental Divide Research Learning Center based at Rocky Mountain National Park. A three-staged approach: information, involvement, and internship helps best prepare students. It provides students with multiple entry points to employment with the NPS. These opportunities include volunteering, citizen science, service learning, and shadowing. Students engage with the park based on their level of interest and commitment.

Career Choices

The Eagle Rock Internship Program focuses on bridging the critical years between high school and college when students are making decisions that will influence their career choices. Students may choose a NPS career path in environmental education, administration, facility management, resource stewardship, or visitor protection. This program gives students hands-on experience, and connects them to mentors in the work force, as they begin their working relationship. This innovative educational and development program emphasizes active, interdisciplinary, experiential learning.



The Eagle Rock Internship Program begins with volunteer experience, followed by a temporary full-time, paid position at the park, complemented by professional development training. The volunteer experience corresponds with a course at Eagle Rock School. Students divide their time evenly between volunteering in the park and attending Eagle Rock School where they discuss and apply their park experiences in the classroom. Staff from Rocky Mountain National Park and Eagle Rock School work closely together to ensure the volunteer and classroom experiences are complimentary. During the second half of the program, the qualified students are hired through the critical hiring authority.

Park Experience

The national park training and professional development that the students and the park participate in consists of a series of assignments, activities, and discussions. This includes documenting their fieldwork in an intern workbook, recording their experiences through photo assignments, setting goals, working with supervisors on progress assessments, and reflecting on their experience. The Pathways to Parks internship is unique because it is guided by weekly themes based on fundamental competencies (personal and professional attributes that are critical to successful performance) of leaders in the federal government: interpersonal skills, oral communication, integrity/honesty, written communication, continual learning, and public service motivation. The purpose of the assignments is to help the interns make the most from their experience and provide a context to assess and develop knowledge, skills, and abilities.

Future Stewards

This Eagle Rock Internship Program supports sharing national parks with students and nurtures the next generation of park stewards. Both Rocky Mountain National Park and Eagle Rock students profit from this carefully structured program, in part because students are introduced to working in the park as volunteers and are more prepared to make the transition into employees. As an organization, the NPS benefits by connecting with a diverse student population at a time when career choices are being made. Ashalou Harrison, 17, from Hawaii stated, "When I think of the future of Rocky, I see a more diverse community and more youth being involved." She has ideas of how to make this future a reality.